



Empowering Communities, Advocating Solutions.

Testimony to the CGA Appropriations Committee

By Louis W. Burch

Citizens Campaign for the Environment

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Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, esteemed vice chairs and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Governor's Budget Proposal.

My name is Louis Burch, Program Coordinator for Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE). Supported by over 80,000 members in Connecticut and New York State, CCE works to empower communities and advocate for solutions that protect public health and the natural environment. CCE offers the following testimony regarding the Governor's Proposed FY 2018-2019 Biennial Budget:

Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP)

Connecticut's fiscal crisis is adversely impacting the state's most important state institutions, including the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). DEEP has been subject to ongoing budget cuts in recent years, leading to the loss of more than 125 full-time staff in the last five years alone. These cuts to key agency staff have had a direct impact on the agency's ability to deliver on basic functions and services, including prolonged response time on permit applications, closure of state parks, and lax enforcement of certain environmental standards.

DEEP took a 4.8% cut in its General Fund budget in 2016, from an original appropriation: \$70,826,549 down to final appropriation of ~\$66,514,165. *This means that of the total state expenditures in 2016 (approximately \$18.36 billion), less than .366% of the State's General Fund dollars went towards environmental protection and energy regulatory services.* The agency's budget received an additional 13.84% cut in 2017, from the original appropriation of \$71,360,584, to an estimated final appropriation of \$61,484,340 in 2017.

The 2018-2019 Governor's budget proposal recommends slashing the agency's General Fund expenditures again, from \$61,484,340 in 2017 to \$60,968,446 each year for 2018 and 2019. Naturally, these numbers are expected to change, and deeper cuts are anticipated under the 2019 midterm budget adjustments. If approved, these cuts would leave the agency with less than .342% of the State's total General Fund budget and necessitate the loss of 24 additional full-time agency staff at DEEP.

DEEP staff provides a long list of vital environmental services to Connecticut's communities, including drinking water protection, open space conservation, and municipal recycling programs, as well as managing our state parks and environmental education programs. The agency is also responsible for permitting and enforcement on a broad range environmental quality and public health matters, including wastewater management, hunting and fishing, air and water quality monitoring, pollution prevention, and many, many others.

Since the agency was formed in 2011 by merging the CT Dept. of Environmental Protection with the Dept. of Public Utility Control, DEEP was also made responsible for the critically important role of regulating our state's utilities and working to develop a cleaner, more efficient energy grid for our State. This includes energy procurement, development of renewable energy resources, energy efficiency programs, and enforcement of environmental standards.

Staff shortages in permitting and enforcement severely impair the agency's ability to implement environmental standards and ensure uniform and thorough management of our state's utilities and precious natural resources. If current budget trends persist, important clean energy and environmental protection services will continue to suffer in our state as debilitating cuts continually force key agency staff to do more with less. **This is a fallacy, we don't do more with less; we do less with less. Clean energy and a healthy environment are a necessity, not a luxury. CCE opposes the DEEP cuts to our environment laid out in the Governor's 2018-2019 budget proposal, and recommends that the 2018-2019 biennium budget for DEEP provide additional funding for environmental programs, permitting, and enforcement, working toward a goal of 1% of overall state spending.**

Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is an independent body working to promote government accountability and ensure proper compliance and enforcement of important environmental standards. It publishes a comprehensive annual report on the state of Connecticut's environment, makes policy recommendations to the General Assembly, and holds monthly hearings to solicit public comments and citizen complaints. CEQ is a vital independent watchdog that directly benefits environmental health and the quality of life of every resident of our State.

Currently, there are only two paid staff positions at CEQ. The agency's total projected budget allocations for the 2018-2019 terms are approximately \$174,907 per year. In total, this makes up less than .001% of the State's General Fund budget in each of the next two years. The Governor's proposed biennium budget proposes to eliminate funding for both CEQ positions and additional expenses. This would leave Connecticut without an independent environmental watchdog at a time when DEEP is increasingly stressed in its ability to deliver basic environmental services.

CEQ's two paid positions make up a tiny fraction of the state's total budget and require only a relatively small investment of capital, yet they provide valuable and necessary services for taxpayers in Connecticut. Eliminating CEQ would be an unfair and disproportionate blow to Connecticut's environmental protection infrastructure, which could lead to more pollution in our state, decreased enforcement, and diminished air and water quality in the long term. It is a short sighted plan and must not be rejected. **CEQ must be allowed to maintain its functions and independence, so that it can continue to safeguard Connecticut's precious environmental resources for years to come. CCE opposes eliminating CEQ and urges to restore the Council's funding in the final 2018-2019 biennium budget.**

On behalf of our members in Connecticut, we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony and look forward to working with you further on these important issues.